

The Classical Weekly

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WHOLE No. 792

LATER LATIN EPIC AND LUCAN

In recent years any novel that has to do with farming, or that involves characters of more than one generation of a family, or that is translated from a Scandinavian language has been styled epic by the writers of 'blurbs'. Mr. James Truslow Adams entitles his description of the development of American civilization *The Epic of America*, and I have seen the Empire State building in New York City referred to as the American epic in steel and stone. The word *epic* is thus loosely used because it is so difficult of precise definition. So keen and practised a student of literature as Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie suggests¹ that we may determine whether a given poem is epic by noting whether our experience in reading it is like our experience in reading the *Iliad* or *Paradise Lost*. Such a procedure is distressing to Aristotelians who demand precise definitions, but it will suffice for our present purposes.

Now the epic poetry of several peoples widely disparate geographically and chronologically does exhibit remarkable similarities in details and in spirit. Students of comparative literature have seized upon these similarities in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, in *Beowulf* and the so-called Poetic Edda, in the elements worked into the *Kalevala*, in the Song of Roland and in the *Nibelungenlied*, and have shown that in the development of each of the peoples involved there occurs a recognizably similar stage which is properly styled heroic. Epic materials and conditions are in each instance available, and in each instance the invention of epic poetry occurs afresh. *Heroic* is a good word for the stage indicated. These poems are dominated by strong individuals whose chief concern is with pride and glory. Their mastery over their environment, dominion over enemies human and supernatural, control over the materials of life have a definite spiritual quality. Auditors experience these achievements and attitudes vicariously, and so attain a feeling of adequacy to the world about them. Yet splendid as a hero's achievements must be, they ought not be beyond the current conceptions of what is possible or what is desirable: else the hero will cease to be credible. That is why Western readers fail to perceive the epic qualities of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Rama's exploits are so exaggerated to a restrained occidental imagination and the compelling impulse to heroism so alien to our traditions; it becomes difficult to acclimate ourselves to the lushness of an

exotic growth. Ty Cobb regularly batted over .400 and John L. Sullivan fought seventy-five rounds; we gasp in reverent awe, and our more robust youth may strive to emulate. But if youth is told that Ty Cobb batted .900 and John L. Sullivan fought 750 rounds, the moral effectiveness is dissipated; the giants that walked the earth in an elder day can provide neither precept nor example. What have puny mortals of to-day, *οἱ τοῦ νῦν βροτοὶ οἱ τοῦ νῦν*, to do with gods? In Homer, you remember, great heroes at times of special stress could sometimes lift stones such as two men could scarcely lift nowadays. In Apollonius of Rhodes the figure is four. On the last page of the *Aeneid* Aeneas wields a stone such as twelve modern decadents could not manage. 2:4:12 is a correct proportion, but an inverse one, of the importance of the individual heroes in the epics involved².

Individual prowess and adequacy to the hard conditions of life are by no means the only characteristics of an epic. There are a hundred other things, epithets and similes and repetitions and gods and hexameters, but it is the less tangible qualities that are of prime significance for the human spirit, and that is what concerns me now. Heroic epic of that description is impossible to-day. Modern warfare effaces the individual utterly; our battles are fought by conglomerations of the odious little vermin that the King of Brobdingnag perceived mankind to be. The Homeric warrior took pride in his mastery over his weapons, which cannot have been very effective, over his horse, which was probably of a stunted breed, over his roast beef, which was not cooked with imagination. We ought to gloat when we produce light or music or sixty miles per hour by pressing a jigger; but we did not make the things and we do not understand them, and instead of exalting our pride and giving us glory they debase us. We sit at desks and answer bells; for us the uttermost limit of *kudos* is to have our names upon another 3 x 5 card in the Congressional Library. Of the many things whose use we enjoy we may not say, in the language of Scripture, These are the works of my hands wherein I take pride.

Students of epic are inclined to draw a sharp line after heroic poetry of the type to which I have referred. This type they call primitive or authentic epic, and they insist that the literary epics so-called, which include all Roman work, do not belong in the same genus, but are only an artificial approximation of it. The burden of what I have to say depends on the falsity of this dichotomy. If Roman epic is merely adhering to a formula, employing a prescribed meter, scope, tone, and

¹In a little book entitled *The Epic*, page 41 (New York, Doran, 1914 [?]). Two other books that have been particularly helpful in the preparation of this paper are H. V. Routh, *God, Man and Epic Poetry* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1927. Two volumes) and J. Wight Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age* (London, Unwin, 1927).

²The passages are *Iliad* 5.302, 12.447; Apollonius Rhodius 3.1367; Vergil, *Aeneid* 12.896.

doing nothing else, it is of course not epic in the full sense. Classical students must not minimize the importance of form, but clearly form is not all-sufficient, in any art. We demand that a work should be sincere, that it should satisfy or point a need of the human spirit. Otherwise it is trifling. Goethe has given the classical expression to this proposition³:

Wer nie sein Brot mit Tränen ass,
Wer nie die kummervollen Nächte
Auf seinem Bette weinend sass,
Der Kennt euch nicht, ihr himmlischen Mächte!

A poet must himself be oppressed by a realization of men's proneness to anemia or sagging viscera before he can lend men a feeling of heroic adequacy. If Roman epic does something to the consciousness of its readers, if it lends them, for example, that feeling of adequacy to their environment of which I have spoken, it is good epic. From this point of view, certainly, it is futile to draw distinctions between the primitive and the developed types of epic composition. The conscious literary artist and his supposedly naive predecessor alike make use of materials that are at hand and of forms sanctioned by tradition in order to express for their people the spiritual values they have perceived.

Of course spiritual values change. In the Roman Empire you can not go insisting on your individual pride and glory, and proving the point by reminding the Emperor that his face is like a dog's and his heart a deer's. That would not make you adequate to your environment, whether your trouble was grinding regimentation or a sophisticated perplexity at the futility of it all. If you are a thoughtful man, something else is needed to make you adequate to your environment, some explanation for the effort, the bloodshed, the suppression of the individual, and Vergil gives it to you in the destiny of Rome. It is the destiny of Rome, clearly, that is the subject of the Aeneid, and not the man Aeneas. He has his use, of course, but it is not to serve as the model for a satisfying life; we are not expected to thrill over his exploits, to exult in their vicarious experience, to emulate his example. In the Iliad, on the other hand, it is not the Trojan War but the man that is important. A real man may be able to hoist a stone double the usual weight; it does not surprise us that the destiny of Rome incarnate can do six times as well. When we remember Vergil's dramatic truth, the verisimilitude of his imagery, his cautious use of divine intervention, we realize that Aeneas's extraordinary prowess is intentional and not inept exaggeration. Achilles is a way of life for the heroic age, the destiny of Rome is a way of life for Romans; for Puritans the relations between God and man are the substance of life, and the Puritan poet makes men adequate to life by illuminating these relations.

But the case for Roman epic after Vergil is not so clear. From the first century we have extant four very considerable narrative poems which the handbooks classify as epic, to wit, Lucan's so-called *Pharsalia*, the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus, the *Punica* of Silius Italicus, and the *Thebais* of Papinius Statius. These poems exhibit certain traits in common which combine

to mark out a very definite type, of which there must have existed a great many examples. If we look at one specimen of post-Vergilian epic and mark its merits and its faults, we shall have a gauge for other specimens of the type and a background against which we can notice their deviations from the normal pattern. Fortunately we have an example which embodies the characteristics of Roman epic practice, and on the subject of whose merits there is practical unanimity among critics. It is generally agreed that the *Punica* of Silius Italicus is an extremely bad epic⁴.

What is the poem like? In a word, it is the material of the third decad of Livy, versified and adorned according to rules abstracted from Vergil. Julius Caesar Scaliger's law of 1500 years later is anticipated⁵: *Haec omnia <descriptions of natural phenomena and man's handiwork>, quae imiteris, habes apud alteram naturam, id est, Virgilium*. Silius has all the traditional epic lumber. There are the strife among the gods and their constant intervention on behalf of their favorites, portents, dreams, revelations from the dead, armings, feastings, single combats, epithets and similes according to the epic pattern. The divine machinery is wearisome enough in connections where it has a certain artistic fitness, as we shall remark in the cases of the *Argonautica* and the *Thebais*. But here it is brought to bear on a chapter of actual history, not an imaginative realization of history with merely poetic truth, as we have it in Vergil, but an entirely familiar epoch of Roman history whose incidents and heroes were thoroughly understood by every literate Roman. Roman military success might have been magnificently justified in idealistic terms, and the individual Roman might have been exalted as an adequate human being; but the ubiquitous intervention of the gods tends to flatten out the exaltation of human worth which Livy's prose makes vivid. If it were a question of genuine religious feeling such as we have in Herodotus or in the Persians of Aeschylus, where the attitude toward the Greek victory over the barbarians is *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name ascribe the glory*, then we should have exaltation of another sort and quite as legitimate. But we know that Silius's belief in the Olympians was no more real than our own, and this artificiality in a very essential matter is itself enough to alienate an honest reader. In Valerius and Statius the artificiality of the Olympians is only part of the larger artificiality of dealing with a subject from Greek mythology, and therefore immeasurably less objectionable. Lucan deals with an historic epoch as familiar as the Punic War, and he shows his sincerity by abolishing the Olympians altogether, except for such ornamental uses as even Lucretius indulges in, and substituting Stoic philosophy and frank magic to satisfy the traditional epic requirement of superhuman detail. Not only are persons dwarfed by the gods in Silius and made unreal by epic stuffing; Silius similarly flattens out and makes unreal the dramatic intensity of incident after incident in Livy's spirited account. Livy's

³J. D. Duff's introduction to his translation of Silius (*The Loeb Classical Library*, 1934) has the only kind words for that author that I have seen in print (xi-xvii).

⁴Poetics, Book 3, Chapter 4 (page 288 in the edition of 1594).

⁵In Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, Book 2, Chapter 13.

chapters on Hannibal's crossing the Alps only want cutting up into hexameters to make superb epic; the glory of high achievement has gone out of Silius's account.

Perhaps, if Vergil had provided a precedent for glorifying an enemy's exploit in traversing a difficult mountain range, Silius might have done better. What Vergil does provide precedent for we have in Silius, and in abundance. Every simile and every episode have a familiar ring. Scipio, like Aeneas, represents Rome; Hannibal, like Turnus, represents the enemy. Hannibal, this time, has the marvellous shield, but Scipio descends to Hades to learn the future. Asbyrte, heroine of Saguntum, is another Camilla; Euryalus's speech to Nisus is reproduced in Imilce's parting speech to her husband Hannibal. With equal absurdity the battles are made up, according to the epic rule, of single combats described at wearisome length, with invocations, apostrophes, lineages, and colloquies between the antagonists featuring names and places. The details of the exchange of blows and their effect upon the human anatomy are remembered in the *Iliad* because man is the center of interest. The blows not only demonstrate the hero's prowess and prestige, but they afford the kind of pleasure our more intellectual age might take in the post-mortem of a bridge game. But in Silius, as in the other writers of Roman epic, these descriptions of single combats show that the authors are composing epic exercises rather than obeying any vital necessity of inspiration. Of the author's heart and mind we get no glimpse.

Valerius Flaccus and Statius might be characterized in much the same terms as Silius, with distinctions in degree rather than in kind. The most obvious difference between Silius's poem and Statius's *Thebais* is that the latter makes no pretence to subject matter in any way relevant to the interests of first-century Romans. But the objection to Statius's treatment of the old story of the Theban brothers is not that it is old, but that beyond a few vigorous incidents and great moments the poet has given us nothing of himself; he has not imagined the story anew or so interpreted it that it could be of spiritual use to his readers. Comparisons between ancient and modern literatures are almost always misleading, but sometimes illuminating nevertheless. What literary material has received more frequent and diverse treatment than the story of Tristram and Isold? Yet Edward Arlington Robinson's fresh handling gives the old story new beauty and new worth. Statius is more the conscious artist in words than Silius. He delights in straining the meaning of words, and his allusions, after the learned and obscure fashion of the Alexandrians, are often so remote that he cannot be understood without a commentary. This deftness, learning, and occasional vigor have found warm admirers in various ages. Dante classes Statius with Vergil, Homer, and himself, and Chaucer mentions him with enthusiasm several times.

Patronizing ancient classics and asserting the superiority of our criticism to Dante's and Chaucer's give us a comfortable expansive feeling. It may be pertinent to observe that we are seeking different things in our

criticism. Perhaps these Roman poets had no thought of edifying their audiences, but meant simply to entertain them. Indeed, that seems the guiding principle of Roman epic composition from the beginning of Latin letters when Livius Andronicus preferred *Odyssey* to *Iliad* for presentation to an Italian audience. Amusement rather than edification seems to be the aim of Valerius Flaccus. The voyage of the *Argo*, the winning of the Golden Fleece, and the loves of Jason and Medea make a thrilling tale that has absorbed and delighted readers and hearers from the dim antiquity from which Homer drew down to William Morris's poem on *The Life and Death of Jason*; and Valerius does not obstruct his story with criticisms and reflections on life. His telling of the love story is admirable; Jason is more virile and more gallant than in Apollonius, though he proves the same selfish ingrate in the sequel.

Valerius, then, may be more readable than Statius or Silius, but in obtruded learning and rhetoric and in excessive fidelity to the established canons of epic composition he is clearly to be classed with them. He too falls short of true epic.

There remains only Lucan to be considered, and at first sight Lucan is too much like the others to afford much hope. He apostrophizes, he has numerous animal similes, his battles are described by single encounters, he has the usual episodes, expressions, and details reminiscent of Vergil. But there is a difference. In a first reading Lucan's absurd rhetoric, his ludicrous exaggeration, his ill-timed philosophizing, his ponderous misinformation, his tendency to digress, his distorted moral values are apt to distract attention from his merits. Yet even in his worst aberrations we may perceive that we are dealing with a man of spirit, with strong convictions, albeit ill-defined and possibly misguided, on morals and philosophy and art. Here is a man who has something to say and knows how he wants to say it, who is not effacing his own individuality in a purely traditional treatment of a purely traditional theme. For his subject Lucan chose a great struggle which was of real moment to all the civilized world and which has determined the course of history until our own day. Nor was the struggle so remote in time as to have only academic interest. One way of life was opposed to another, and the passions involved were still ardent enough to make partisanship dangerous. Lucan is partisan and thereby he demonstrates his vital quality. The inconsistency of his enthusiasms only proves their realness. He was barely past the age of an American undergraduate when he wrote his poem, and he has all the ardor of a new convert to a philosophic system that was really a religion, and all the eagerness and liberal politics of a newly enlightened communicant of the Social Problems Club.

The abundance of Lucan's enthusiasm is illustrated by the disagreement of critics as to who the hero of his poem is. Dean Merivale, who was an admirer of Lucan, maintains that the Senate is the hero⁴; this is

⁴Charles Merivale, *History of the Romans Under the Empire*, Chapter 54 (=6.465, in the edition published at London by Longmans, in 1872). H. C. Nutting, *The Hero of the Pharsalia*, *The American Journal of Philology* 53 (1932), 41-52 suggests that Liberty is the hero.

correct, for it is Republican government that Lucan advocates. But an epic must have a personal hero. Pompey is the titular hero of the poem, for he represents the old constitutional government. Pompey is also, so to speak, the emotional hero of the poem. His reflections before the Battle of Pharsalus, his conduct in defeat, and especially his relations with his wife Cornelia are told with sympathy and tenderness. But the story is after all one of action and battle; and Lucan's manifest admiration of Caesar's courage and decision and resourcefulness makes Caesar the hero in the epic sense. On the other hand, the philosophic basis for all Lucan's liberalism was the Stoic teaching. The perfect embodiment of the Stoic ideal was Cato, and in the poem Cato alone is never discouraged, never compromising, never selfish. Certainly Cato is the moral hero of the poem. One of the most magnificent of Lucan's many excellent speeches, and one characteristic of the temper of the poem is Cato's reply to the renegade Labienus who had advised him to consult the oracle of Hammon in connection with the march through the African desert⁷:

What question do you bid me ask, Labienus? Whether I would rather fall in battle, a free man, than witness a tyranny? Whether it makes no difference if life be long or short? Whether violence can ever hurt the good, or Fortune threatens in vain when Virtue is her antagonist? Whether the noble purpose is enough, and virtue becomes no more virtuous by success? I can answer these questions, and the oracle will never fix the truth deeper in my heart. We men are all inseparable from the gods, and, even if the oracle be dumb, all our actions are predetermined by Heaven. The gods have no need to speak; for the Creator told us once for all at our birth whatever we are permitted to know. Did he choose these barren sands, that a few might hear his voice? did he bury truth in this desert? Has he any dwelling-place save earth and sea, the air of heaven and virtuous hearts? Why seek we further for deities? All that we see is God; every motion we make is God also. Men who doubt and are ever uncertain of future events—let *them* cry out for prophets: I draw my assurance from no oracle but from the sureness of death. The timid and the brave must fall alike; the god has said this, and it is enough.

Here are flamboyant and untimely rhetoric, if you will strained antitheses, irrelevant Stoic doctrine, but here are also conviction and a masterful hero who has achieved epic adequacy, not, this time, over weapons and roast beef and hostile spearmen, but over tyranny and superstitions that trammel life and crush it. That is not to say that Lucan is merely a moral teacher in verse, however sincere and ardent, like Lucretius, or that he is merely a lyric poet, in the sense that the lyric poet uses his medium to express his individual emotions. It is a narrative poem with which we are dealing; this noble speech of Cato is dramatically truthful, and therefore all the more effective. So elsewhere the spiritual values of the poem are woven into its texture; they are not appended in detachable maxims like so many ornaments. Epic heroes do not retail their spiritual values by discourses on gallantry and breeding, but by their lives and their works.

To appreciate Lucan's achievement we must realize

⁷9.566-584, in the translation of J. D. Duff in *The Loeb Classical Library* (1928).

the difficulties involved in giving spiritual worth to a poetic treatment of an historical theme. In classical Greek literature such treatment occurs in drama. It must be remembered that to the Greeks the stories of Thebes and of Argos and of the deification of heroes were historical. In each case the action is removed from the realm of the familiar, usually by remoteness in time, in the case of our single historical play, the Persians of Aeschylus by remoteness in space. In each case, the Persians not excepted, an imaginative interpretation of the action, never in essential conflict with the recorded data, gives expression to the author's perception of the spiritual values involved. In English literature one of the finest poetic treatments of historical material, valid as poetry, authentic as history, and valuable for its spiritual content is, I think, Thomas Hardy's *The Dynasts*. Hardy inquired painstakingly into the phases of the Napoleonic Wars with which he deals, and put down nothing for which he could not cite authority. Even in selection of incidents for elaboration he committed no distortion of perspective. Then how does he find play for his imagination and give expression to his spiritual perceptions? By the device of symbolic choruses of ironic spirits, in whose actual existence Hardy of course does not believe and whose separateness he indicates by the use of italic type. In John Brown's *Body* Stephen Vincent Benét is also careful not to do violence to the history of our Civil War. His imaginative effects are produced by selecting a number of individuals and reverting to one and another of them in connection with the succeeding phases of the war, so that we are ultimately enabled to see the effects of the war on each. Petronius, in what is apparently a criticism of Lucan, suggests another remedy for the intractable nature of the historical theme⁸:

... anyone who attempts the vast theme of the Civil War will sink under the burden unless he is full of literature. It is not a question of recording real events in verse; historians can do that far better. The free spirit of genius must plunge headlong into allusions and divine interpositions, and rack itself for epigrams coloured by mythology, so that what results seems rather the prophecies of an inspired seer than the exactitude of a statement made on oath before witnesses. . . .

The chief merit of Lucan, as compared with his fellow practitioners of Roman epic, is that he rejected the prescription of learned allusions and divine interpositions and epigrams colored by mythology. Merivale goes so far as to say that he wrote as if he had never read Vergil⁹; this is much too broad a statement, as can be seen by the statistics in Heitland's valuable *Introduction*¹⁰, even though many of Heitland's parallels are wholly fanciful. I have already mentioned Lucan's rejection of divine interpositions as a proof of his sincerity. His men are not puppets; he has a truly epic emphasis on the prowess of human individuals. He does not abound in allusions nor does he parade hackneyed erudition. He has learning, indeed too much

⁸*Satyricon* 118, in the translation of Michael Heseltine, in *The Loeb Classical Library* (1913). Opinions of other Latin authors as to whether Lucan is to be classed as poet or historian are discussed by Eva Matthews Sanford, *Lucan and his Roman Critics*, *Classical Philology* 26 (1931), 232-257.

⁹Chapter 64, 8.73 in the edition mentioned in note 6, above.

¹⁰W. E. Heitland's *Introduction* to C. E. Haskins's edition of *Lucan, cviii-cxxvi* (London, Bell, 1887).

learning and most of it wrong, but it is a new type of learning. He is interested in geography, though most of his geography is wildly erratic; he talks at length of astronomy, though most of his astronomy is unintelligible, and he observes no times or seasons for intruding his astronomical discourses; he is interested in snakes and lists them in one of his deplorable catalogues. But his lengthy account of the effects of their bites in the Libyan desert is infinitely more vigorous and poetical than his source Nicander. Absurdities are more absurd in a sober treatise than in an intense and vivid situation. Cato's soldiers that disappeared entirely or swelled up indefinitely as the result of snake bites do not *compel* laughter. Indeed, unless one fortifies himself with the critic's air of cynical detachment it is perfectly possible to be carried away by the episode. Despite the aberrations such a passage as Cato's march through the desert shows a genuine enthusiasm for a thoroughly heroic exploit of a perfectly adequate hero, and it speaks for Lucan's poetic imagination and sincerity that he should have seized upon the exploit and celebrated it. What if we have incidental disquisitions on the origin of serpents, their classification, and the effects of their bites? The poet makes us feel, I think, that to him the learning is fresh and compelling; it still involves the sense of wonder, which is of the essence of poetry, and is not just another exhibition of stale knowledge.

But the snakes are not the worst. Lucan seems to have a passion for dwelling on the harrowing, the revolting, the ghoulish. His witch episode in Book 6 (507-830) is a study in morbid ghoulishness, he revels in repulsive details of putrefaction of human bodies, he exercises a diabolic ingenuity in inventing horrible kinds of wounds. The lurid carnage in the sea-battle off Massilia in Book 3 (538-762) is an example. The ships were prevented from coming close by the crowded corpses in the water; the wounded that fell into the sea drank their own blood mixed with brine; Catus is pierced in back and breast at the same moment, and the blood stays because it is in doubt which way to gush out, until its torrent expels both weapons simultaneously; there are gruesome details of detached members and entrails. There is the same sort of thing in Book 6 (194-195), where in the fighting about Dyrachium Scaeva has made himself so conspicuous in the forefront that nothing protects his vitals except the spears that stick in his bones. That is rather strong, and the critics profess amusement. Doubtless it is amusing, but I would propose one query. Is it not possible that such amusement arises from a sophisticated determination not to be horrified? The grotesqueness can hardly be other than intentional; may it not succeed in producing the horror it was calculated to produce if the reader, again, will lend himself to the poet and not persist in critical detachment? Is it not possible, in other words, that Lucan is using exaggeration as an idiom of poetry, which his critics then refuse to read as other than prose? The error is not unexampled. Commentators say that several puzzling passages in the Scriptures are due to a prosaic redactor's literal acceptance of hyperbole in a poetic source. Gruesomeness

is deliberately used by such keen judges of the effective as Euripides and Shakespeare.

Similar considerations must govern our attitude toward another of Lucan's traits which is apt to loom as an even greater defect than his gruesomeness, his tendency toward rhetorical expression and rhetorical display. Perhaps the most clamorous instance is Volteius's speech to his men on board a raft which had been trapped by the Pompeians (4.476-520). This speech is impossible in the situation, it is artificial in its strained antitheses and epigrams, it strikes a moral falsetto, it has all the faults of the rhetorical schools. Granted. But it has the highest merit as rhetoric, and in addition ardor and glamor and lifting power, which similar speeches in the tragedies of Lucan's uncle Seneca have not. Deftness in the use of words is a legitimate attribute of any poet; in a Latin poet such deftness is almost bound to take the form of epigrams. The remarkable thing about Lucan's rhetoric is that he has been able to assimilate so much of it to the fiery torrent of his narrative and to transmute it into poetry. As Professor Mackail has written¹¹, "Pure rhetoric has perhaps never come quite so near being poetry".

Explaining Lucan's faults does not remove them, any more than insisting on his youth makes his poem great. But Lucan has written with conviction a poem of great sweep and national interest, dealing with a momentous struggle directed by heroic figures that do not transcend human stature, and informed by ideals that are more vital than literary commonplaces. Like as he is to Silius and Statius and Valerius in a hundred superficial details, he alone gives his readers the authentic experience of epic poetry, and it is a pity to allow his work to moulder with theirs.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

MOSES HADAS

REVIEW

Third Year Latin. New Revision of Kelsey's Cicero, With Added Selections from Cicero, Sallust, Livy, and Pliny <the Younger>, Arranged and Edited, With Explanatory Notes, A Companion, Essentials of Grammar and Syntax, and Vocabulary, by Bruno Meinecke. Boston: Allyn and Bacon (1933). Pp. xxi, 720, (2), 229.

In Professor Meinecke's revision of Kelsey's Cicero we have a book of over 960 pages professedly designed exclusively for the penultimate year of Latin study in the Secondary School. There is absolutely no excuse for placing a textbook of such forbidding bulk in the hands of children. Yes, the pupils of the third year *are* children, immature in mind, lacking in ambition, children, despite what they may individually think in magnification of the importance and the dignity of their budding adolescence. Professor Meinecke himself says in the Preface (v): "This book contains enough material from Cicero's writings alone to occupy the student's time for more than a full year. . . ." But the main title

¹¹J. W. Mackail, *Latin Literature*, 176 (New York, Scribner, 1895).

of the book is "Third Year Latin". What can be done about it? Take two years to cover the book? That will hardly be practicable. Reviewer and Reviser are thus in accord that the book is unsuited, quantitatively, to its designed and expressed purpose.

As a scholarly achievement, the book is a superb piece of work. *But it is too good.* It skyrockets far above the heads of its proposed clientele. Much of the material is far too advanced for third-year pupils. True, it does not encroach upon the material of the fourth year, for that is poetry. But, with its philosophy, Livy, and Pliny the Younger, it does seriously encroach upon the Freshman year in College. The enormous bulk of a book crowded with this material is emphasized by the fact that the publishers have found it necessary to issue separately as a supplement what should have been an integral part of the work, the Exercises in Prose Composition. Imagine a student compelled to turn the leaves of a thousand-page volume to find the text upon which in a supplementary volume a given exercise in Latin writing is based.

It is a pity that a book which is *in general* of such sterling quality should err so egregiously *quantitatively*.

For the inclusion of one thing, the Catilina of Sallust, there are strong reasons. The inclusion of the Catilina affords, despite its often confusing peculiarities of diction and syntax, a second point of view regarding a single event, an event of the utmost importance in Roman history both because of the peril in which it placed the Republic, and because of its later political repercussions. There is, first, in the Catilinarian Orations the point of view of the lawyer and the politician; Sallust gives us the point of view of a historian who had tried Roman political life and had made a failure of it, and who naively comments that in the politics of Rome 'many things were against me'. When two such men, of divergent talents, agree in their estimate of a character, we must admit that this estimate is likely to be correct.

But the two philosophical works of Cicero which are included in this book are utterly superfluous. Philosophy has not the slightest interest for adolescents, except for a few *rarae aves* among them. The De Senectute is philosophy in a minor key, and affords the rather sorry spectacle of an old man trying to persuade himself that he does not regret the vanished years. The De Amicitia is on a rather higher plane. The former piece is personal, the latter is universal. But neither of them is interesting to the young.

The selections from Livy and Pliny the Younger have no place in a third-year book. Grant that Livy is a "Graphic Historian". There is much else that is graphic in Roman historical literature—the work of Tacitus, for instance. The pupil, if he continues the study of Latin, will make the acquaintance of Livy later, and will be better prepared for him. Run through the Notes in this book, and mark the number of peculiarities listed as Livian. Grant that Pliny the Younger is "Rome's foremost gentleman". Third-year students do not need to meet him. Pliny's language would seem a little strange to Cicero himself, for their births are separated by 168 years. This is 1936. Is not the English of 1768 a bit

queer and stilted to us, and would not ours seem to the men of 1768 queer and loose-jointed? The presence of these selections from Livy and Pliny the Younger makes for confusion of style and syntax. To the budding Latinist this confusion is a real confusion of tongues. It should be sedulously avoided.

The letters of Cicero are a perpetual delight. But they will not be, they cannot be, read in the third year. There is no time for them, for the unfortunate tendency in nearly all Secondary Schools is to 'spread the butter thin'. The motto is no longer *non multa, sed multum*, but its inverse, a variety of subjects and forty-minute recitations.

If we add to the doing of all the other tasks imposed by this book strict obedience to Professor Meinecke's injunction (vi) that the illustrations "should receive fully as much attention as the rest of the text", a triennium of study would be required for the mastery of this book.

The idea of grouping comment and literary analysis in a Companion is original and excellent, and the results are valuable. The Companion (485-720) includes an account of Cicero (485-506), The Orations of Cicero (507-546), The Essay on Old Age (546-553), The Essay on Friendship (553-556), The Letters of Cicero (558-562), Livy, The Graphic Historian of Rome (562-564), Pliny, Rome's Foremost Gentleman (564-570), The Roman Government in Cicero's Time (570-572), Essentials of Grammar (573-699), Cicero and the Modern World (700-701), Helps to the Study of Cicero (702-706), Outline of the History of Latin Literature (707-708).

As will be seen, the term Companion, in the body of the book (not on the title-page) includes the essentials of Latin grammar (forms and syntax). The presentation of the paradigms is briefly and adequately accomplished, except that the omission of all treatment of verb-stems is most regrettable. To neglect the stems in the study of conjugational forms is exactly analogous to neglecting the skeleton in the study of anatomy. The portion of the grammatical review which is devoted to the study of syntax opens with a preliminary note: "All illustrations are to be found in the text". This principle is not merely highly laudable, but necessary if the illustrations are to have any value. But the principle is violated at the very outset. The example quoted to illustrate the second paragraph (87, b) is not to be found in the text included in this book. In paragraph 90, b the example *occisus est cum liberis M. Fulvius consularis* is rendered by "There was slain Marcus Fulvius. . . ." This is certainly stilted English. In my opinion the classifications of the case-constructions are unnecessarily multiplex and complicated. The genitive case is treated under 22 headings, the dative under 16, the accusative under 29, the ablative under exactly 50, if we disregard 7 additional subdivisions of the Ablative Absolute. All this is a severe tax on the pupil's memory, and makes for mental confusion. Assignment of a given construction to a given principle is often a matter of opinion. For example, the possessive element in the genitive dependent on *causa* and on *gratia* is open to question. Under 96, b it should be ex-

plained that the Latin possessive pronoun may carry also both subjective and objective implications. The statement of this paragraph should run, 'A genitive may be used in apposition with a possessive pronoun in any case'. The reason for this statement should be given, that as regards the noun the possessive, subjective, or objective idea is inherent in the case, whereas as regards the pronoun these ideas inhere in the very nature of the word, and consequently no case-indication of them is needed. Of course in the example quoted in 96, b, In Catilinam 1.13 *de nostro omnium interitu*, the idea is objective. Under 103, e, which deals with *rēfert* and *interest*, why not give the explanation of a construction which puzzles every pupil who thinks about it? A bright pupil will wonder why the first *e* of *rēfert* bears the macron.

Occasionally peculiar English finds its way into the translations of the examples (compare the remarks on 90, b, above). To me "guest-friend", as a rendering either of *ξένος* or of *hospes*, is very objectionable. It is not English. Note the strange word-order in the rendering (118, c) of *nihil horum ora . . . moverunt*: "Have not at all the faces of these men affected you?" Why should not the dative in 109, b, *cuique non auferret*, "from whom it would not take away", be called a simple indirect object? The act involved is merely the reverse of giving; with verbs of giving the dative is a simple indirect object. At any rate, the term "dative of separation", used by Professor Meinecke, is abhorrent, since it leads always to confusion with the ablative of separation. In 129, which deals with the Ablative of Comparison, why is nothing said about the regular construction with *quam* and comparatives? In 132, a, the nature of the ablative with *opus est* should be explained. In 136, b, why is *silentio* not an ablative of attendant circumstance (compare 138)? In 139 there is need of at least one example without *cum*. And certainly the ablative with a verb of exchange bears no possible relation to ablatives used with *misceo* and *iungo*. Under 140 I confess that I can detect no causal idea in *quo* used with *impensius rogo*. In translating the example under 142, a, *propinquitate coniunctos atque natura*, why did not the translator simplify the whole problem of the syntax by using *by* instead of *in*? The explanation of the ablative absolute (144) is adequate, as it rarely is in textbooks. In fact, the clausal equivalence of the participle is insisted on wherever participles are treated. And the explanation of the reason for the use of the term 'absolute' is little short of inspiration. It sheds a light on the construction that in my recollection is shed by no other textbook. In 146 the question may be raised whether *urbe* is not an original locative. Why should surviving locative forms be confined to Declensions I and II? Even in those declensions the locative forms in the plural are the same as the ablative forms. In 148, d, in dealing with the gender of a predicate adjective or participle limiting an infinitive, why not clarify by showing that participles are adjectives and infinitives are neuter nouns? In the example *levata (esse) res publica videtur* (148, e) the agreement of *levata* with *res publica* is surely not merely permissive, but obligatory. In the example from Sallust (150, b), how can *utraque* be a

predicate adjective? Indeed, how can it be an adjective at all? In 51, and again in 169, *uterque* is properly called an indefinite pronoun. The principle stated in 150, b, is of course true, but the example does not illustrate it. In considering 150, d, we may readily admit the possible use of an objective genitive with *amore*, but the meaning would be slightly different. The construction of *erga* expresses merely the *direction of an emotion*, just as *iter in Hispaniam* expresses the *direction of motion*. In the example under 164, b, *Nostra, qui remansissemus, caede contentum, nostra* is a perfect example of a possessive pronoun with the force of an objective genitive (compare comment above, on 96, b). In discussing *nescio quis* the statement might have been added that the proof that this pair of words constitutes a compound indefinite pronoun is that the verb of the clause never becomes a subjunctive of indirect question: *nescio* is thus shown to have lost all its verbal force. The problems of the agreement of verbs, of mood and tense, and of questions are admirably handled. In general the dependent clauses are satisfactorily treated; but in 201, c, should we not for *dubito* read *non dubito*? In an affirmative clause *dubito* merely introduces an indirect question and is usually followed by *an*.

The General Observations on Translation, Latin and English Style, merit the careful attention of every student and teacher. Nowhere are the stylistic distinctions between the two languages more clearly shown. The treatment of the supposedly difficult Indirect Discourse eliminates all the difficulties from these constructions for any pupil who thinks. There really are no serious difficulties inherent in Oratio Obliqua. The whole subject is a good deal like a problem in physics: a constant force (the *verbum sentiendi vel declarandi*), acting on a series of constant quantities (the verbs of the quoted clauses), produces constant results. So much for the verbs of the quotation. Common sense will attend to the pronouns—and *nothing else changes*, except that subjects of infinitives stand in the accusative.

There is a section on Cicero and the Modern World in which parallel problems are suggested for third-year pupils. Many of these problems might be used as subjects for a doctor's thesis, for example, Racial Hatred, The Problem of Immigration, The Problem of the Unemployed, The Waning Power of the Senate, and many others. In *Helps to the Study of Cicero* a course of reading is outlined that will keep a Cicero enthusiast busy for a decade. Of course some of these works would be of considerable interest to a Secondary School pupil, if he could steal time from the textbook and class assignments in order to read them. The natural inference is that probably these recommendations were intended for the teachers—and many teachers of Cicero need just such a course, or one even more elementary.

The book, then, is the product of fine scholarship, and is of fascinating interest to a scholar. But its precious grain is strewn from the full sack, not scattered from the hand. It suggests that more Secondary School books should be written by *qualified scholars who will have to teach them*. Such teachers will know their sub-

jects, and—equally important—they will know the human material with which they will have to deal.

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A History of Greece. By Cyril E. Robinson. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company (1929). Pp. xii, 480. 33 Illustrations, 23 Maps.

This book is a parallel volume to the same author's *A History of Rome*. The author's attitude is clearly stated in the Introduction (vi):

To keep an even balance between so many divergent claims is a problem difficult enough; nor is it any easier to determine what emphasis or proportion should rightly be assigned to the various epochs of the narrative. The prehistoric period and the subsequent formation and evolution of the more important states clearly demand a more than cursory description. But partly because, when we come to the fifth and the fourth centuries, our knowledge is at once more detailed and less dependent on conjecture, partly because the interest of those centuries makes a more obvious appeal to modern minds, I have tried to develop their story at somewhat greater length. Nor do I think that any justification is required for an attempt to carry the tale briefly into Hellenistic times. It is impossible to understand the full importance of Greek thought and Greek art to the world, unless we realize that the Greek spirit did not die at Alexander's death in 323 B. C., but on the contrary that it was then for the first time spread over an area not only vast in extent, but also of vast significance to the subsequent history of the civilized world.

The contents of the book are as follows:

Preface (v-vii); I, Land and People (1-4); II, The Prehistoric Age (5-19); III, The Dorians (20-29); IV, Colonies, Trade and Tyranny (30-43); V, Sparta (44-60); VI, Athens (61-92); VII, The Persian Wars (93-123); VIII, From Delian League to Athenian Empire (124-135); IX, The Athenian Land Empire (136-152); X, The Peloponnesian War—The First Phase (182-209); XI, The Peloponnesian War—The Last Phase (228-246); XII, The New Era (247-286); XIII, Sparta's Opportunity (287-312); XIV, The Ascendancy of Thebes (313-331); XV, Philip of Macedon (332-356); XVI, Alexander and Greece (357-362); XVII, The City State and Its Legacy (363-385); XVIII, Alexander and the East (386-415); XIX, The Hellenistic Age and After (416-435); Chronological Tables and Summaries (436-470); Index (471-480).

It is unnecessary to repeat here what I said in my review of the companion volume. In that review I stressed the laudable features of Mr. Robinson's work. The present volume, which was written three years before that on Rome, reveals certain tendencies not so apparent in the later work. Despite the easy style, the modern photographs, and the new maps, it seems curiously dated as a product of the nineteenth-century Private School system in Britain, with all its intimate knowledge of ancient authors, its smug inability to perceive reality in the tale, and its amused tolerance of archaeology. One result of the author's closeness to literary sources is the fact that the history of Greece is, as usual, seen through Athenian spectacles. In the two

chapters on Sparta (V) and Athens (VI), there is perpetuated the usual unflattering—i. e., Athenian—point of view. So, too, the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars receive far fuller treatment than they deserve. In fact, the importance of military affairs receives here its customary exaggeration. To take but a minute example, I note that the loss of the Athenian fleet in the Nile Delta in 456 B. C. is described as follows (130-131): "The Persians happily did not follow up this victory, but the loss of the best part of the Aegean fleet was in itself a staggering blow, and it must have been a nervous moment, perhaps critical, for Greece". But the very next sentence minimizes the crisis with the admission that "a similar adventure was undertaken shortly after".

There is complete lack of proportion in the space devoted to the Peloponnesian War, the account of which occupies no fewer than 64 pages, or more than one-eighth of the whole book. Mr. Robinson is, of course, convinced of the superlative importance of this conflict, which ended "in the utter ruin of Greece" (186). Now this point of view, however hallowed by long tradition, is silly. The facts dictate a simple answer that the war did not bring the ruin of Greece. Mr. Robinson himself says (278): "Notwithstanding the strain and exhaustion of the Peloponnesian War, her peoples persisted for the next two generations in an endless round of suicidal conflicts". He might have gone further. The Greek people kept up a "suicidal conflict" during the Roman period, as the turbulent peoples of the danger zone of Europe are keeping it up in the modern world. The Peloponnesian War was a local affair, which settled a purely local problem. Its seeming importance lies in the fact that it was described by the greatest historian of the ancient world. In a sense, the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars are superb examples of the value of advertising. The whole of Greek history centers in them, but they owe their preeminence chiefly to the fact that they were written up by two superlative historians.

But this criticism must not blind the reader to the fact that Mr. Robinson has written a very readable account of the history of Greece. His narrative of the development of philosophy in the sixth and the fifth centuries is excellent. In it the glamor which unjustly pervades much of the naive speculation of the Greeks is gently dispelled by a realistic but not unsympathetic pen. This treatment is but one of the many indications of a skillful and competent textbook maker.

One of the outstanding features of the book is the presence of excellent maps, intimately connected with the text which they illustrate. Especially helpful are the diagram view of ancient Athens (on the inside front cover) and the map to illustrate early migrations (22).

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